

now proceed to a period for morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, March 17, 1999, the Federal debt stood at \$5,641,694,979,239.08 (Five trillion, six hundred forty-one billion, six hundred ninety-four million, nine hundred seventy-nine thousand, two hundred thirty-nine dollars and eight cents).

One year ago, March 17, 1998, the Federal debt stood at \$5,536,664,000,000 (Five trillion, five hundred thirty-six billion, six hundred sixty-four million).

Five years ago, March 17, 1994, the Federal debt stood at \$4,553,032,000,000 (Four trillion, five hundred fifty-three billion, thirty-two million).

Ten years ago, March 17, 1989, the Federal debt stood at \$2,736,679,000,000 (Two trillion, seven hundred thirty-six billion, six hundred seventy-nine million) which reflects a debt increase of almost \$3 trillion—\$2,905,015,979,239.08 (Two trillion, nine hundred five billion, fifteen million, nine hundred seventy-nine thousand, two hundred thirty-nine dollars and eight cents) during the past 10 years.

CITY OF NEW ORLEANS CRASH

Mr. FITZGERALD. Mr. President, as my colleagues know, a tragic accident occurred in Bourbonnais, Illinois on Monday night when an Amtrak passenger train, the City of New Orleans, collided with a tractor trailer carrying steel rods. According to the National Transportation Safety Board, NTSB, a crew of 18 people and 196 passengers were aboard the City of New Orleans when the accident occurred.

Eleven people lost their lives in the accident, NTSB officials report. I wish to convey my deepest sympathy to the families of the victims and all others who have been touched by this tragedy. Illinois grieves with you.

I would also like to recognize the dedication of the local and State officials and citizens who have prevented this tragedy from becoming even worse. Local citizens worked through the night and into the early morning to locate victims, free them from the wreckage, and treat their injuries. Public safety officials from Bourbonnais, and from the communities and counties surrounding it, worked above and beyond the call of duty to save lives, rescue survivors, and prevent further harm from occurring.

Additionally, Federal officials from the Department of Transportation, the National Transportation Safety Board, the Highway Administration, the Rail-

road Administration, and Health and Human Services have traveled to Illinois to lend their expertise in the aftermath of this horrible accident.

And finally, nonprofit organizations like the American Red Cross have also served the victims, families, and friends associated with this accident. At times like this we remember the fragility of human life, and recognize the magnanimity of the human spirit. We commend the many volunteers and officials involved with the City of New Orleans accident. Their dedication to the welfare of those injured will be remembered in perpetuity.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, we were all saddened by the accident involving the City of New Orleans Amtrak train in Illinois on Monday night.

Several Mississippians lost their lives in the accident including June Bonnin of Nesbit, and Raney and Lacey Lipscomb of Lake Cormorant. I know my colleagues join me in extending our sympathy to their families.

Mr. President, as is so often the case, tragedies such as this can bring out the best in individuals. Based on information provided to my office, it appears that three of the students from Covenant Christian High School in Clinton, Mississippi, who were on the train, became heroes.

These students were part of a group of 15 students returning from a spring break trip to Canada. According to persons on the scene, Michael Freeman, Caleb McNair, and Jeffrey Sartor, all 17-year-old Clinton residents, quickly reacted to the situation.

With fire quickly approaching from a nearby car, Michael and Caleb opened a window and began rescuing people trapped inside the train. Jeffrey and Mrs. Phyllis Hurley, a chaperone who was injured herself, began helping people get out of the train too.

Caleb also assisted firefighters in getting elderly people to safety and getting a young girl freed from the wreckage. When firefighters and other help arrived, Michael was still on top of a car helping people from other cars over to the closest ladder and down from the train. Even after the young men were escorted to the side, they continued to help carry stretchers of wounded to safety.

Mr. President, I extend my sympathy to all the victims and their families affected by the tragedy, and I commend the efforts of these young people and the many firefighters and emergency personnel who acted to save lives and assist the victims.

CERTIFIED NONSENSE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, here we go again. It seems that around this time every year we launch into certification follies. The occasion is the annual requirement that the administration report to Congress on the progress

or lack of progress that countries are making in cooperating on combating drugs. This debate more recently gets personalized around the issue of the certification of Mexico.

There seems to be two basic elements in this affair: The acceptance by some in Congress that the administration only lies on certification therefore we should do away with the process and quit the pretense. And those who argue that it is unfair to judge the behavior of others and to force the President to make such judgments.

I do not think that either of these views is accurate or does justice to the seriousness of the issues we are dealing with. They are also not consonant with the actual requirements in certification.

On the first point. The annual certification process does not require the administration to lie. If an administration chooses to do so, it is not the fault of the certification process. And the fix is not to change the law to enable a lie. The fix is to insist on greater honesty in the process and compliance with the legal requirements.

Now, the Congress is no stranger to elaborate misrepresentations from administrations. Given that fact, this does mean that differences in judgment necessarily mean that one party to the difference is lying. In the past, I have not accepted all the arguments by the administration in certifying Mexico.

Indeed, self-evident facts make such an acceptance impossible and the administration's insistence upon obvious daydreams embarrassing. But I have, despite this, supported the overall decision on Mexico. I have done this for several reasons.

Before I explain, let me summarize several passages from the law that requires the President to report to Congress. There seems to be some considerable misunderstanding about what it says. The requirement is neither unusual nor burdensome. The President must inform Congress if during the previous year any given major drug producing or transit country cooperated fully with the United States or international efforts to stop production or transit. These efforts can be part of a bilateral agreement with the United States. They can be unilateral efforts. Or they can be efforts undertaken in cooperation with other countries, or in conformity with international law.

In making this determination, the President is asked to consider several things: the extent to which the country has met the goals and objectives of the 1988 U.N. Convention on illicit drugs; the extent to which similar efforts are being made to combat money laundering and the flow of precursor chemicals; and the efforts being made to combat corruption.

The purpose for these requirements is also quite simple. It is a recognition by Congress, in response to public demand, that the U.S. Government take